

## **The Editor's Cut - Episode 035 - Interview with Susan Shipton (EditCon 2020 Series)**

Sarah Taylor:

This episode was generously sponsored by Annex Pro and Avid. Hello and welcome to The Editor's Cut. I'm your host, Sarah Taylor. We'd like to point out that the lands on which we have created this podcast and that many of you may be listening to us from are part of ancestral territory. It is important for all of us to deeply acknowledge that we are on ancestral territory that has long served as a place where indigenous peoples have lived, met, and interacted. We honour, respect, and recognize these nations that have never relinquished their rights or sovereign authority over the lands and waters on which we stand today. We encourage you to reflect on the history of the land, the rich culture, the many contributions and the concerns that impact indigenous individuals and communities. Land acknowledgements are the start to a deeper action. Today I bring to you part four of our four-part series covering EditCon that took place on Saturday, February 1st, 2020 at the TIFF Bell Lightbox in Toronto, behind the cut with Susan Shipton. Multi award winning editor, Susan Shipton will share her vast knowledge and experience from her long career in film and network television. Susan has over 40 feature films to her credit. She has cut eight films with director Atom Egoyan, including Oscar nominated The Sweet Hereafter as well as many critically acclaimed television series, such as The Book of Negroes and The Expanse.

[show open]

Just a warning that some of the clips played in this episode contain coarse language and sexual content

Stephen Philipson:

So, it is my great pleasure to introduce our very esteemed keynote speaker. She's the multiple DGC award and Genie award winning editor behind many iconic Canadian films working in a range of tones and styles from art house cinema to historical drama, comedy and science fiction. Her films have been widely recognized around the world at film festivals and by little award shows such as the Oscars. Most notably, she's collaborated with Atom Egoyan on all his films from The Adjuster, to his latest Guest of Honour, including the Oscar nominated and Cannes Jury prize winning, The Sweet Hereafter. She's also worked with other world renowned directors, such as Robert Lepage on Possible Worlds and István Szabó on Being Julia, winning a Genie award and a DGC award for those films, but it doesn't stop there. Her work continues on the small screen with Clement Virgo's, critically acclaimed Book of Negroes, Nurses and Burden of Truth, The Expanse and the new Netflix series, Ginny & Georgia. Of course, I'm talking about Susan Shipton. Our moderator, Sarah Taylor, is the host of The Editor's Cut. The CCE podcast, now making waves internationally. Yes, we have listeners from around the world. She's an award-winning editor with 18 years of experience in documentary and narrative films. Most recently, she edited the short documentary Fast Horse, which screened at over 15 festivals and won a Special Jury Award for directing at the 2019 Sundance Film Festival. Annex Pro and Avid are very excited to welcome-

Pauline Decroix:

Sarah Taylor.

Stephen Philipson:

And Susan Shipton.

Sarah Taylor:

Hello everyone. What a great day. I've been taking lots of notes today and I'm going to take them back to my suite. So thank you for that. And thank you for coming and Susan, thank you for joining me on stage. We have a lot to discuss, so I want to start just briefly, you went to Queen's University and you took film studies and graduated in 1992, which means you've been in the industry for over 30 years.

Susan Shipton:

I graduated in 1982.

Sarah Taylor:

82. I wrote 92, okay 82. Well, you've been in the industry for a while. No, no, 1992, but I'm assuming you have a lot of great stories to tell us. And I don't know the full story, but please tell us about your first job in the film industry.

Susan Shipton:

Well, I did graduate from Queen's University and by the way, thank you for that beautiful introduction. That was really lovely. Thank you. And I had made a couple of short films at Queen's as one did and really enjoyed the editing process, but my goal was actually to write and direct. But I really loved editing, and I really loved what I learned about filmmaking from editing. And it was always in the back of my head that you have to be in a cutting room to really learn what it is to be a filmmaker. So I came to Toronto with all my film school experience and landed my first job slinging burgers at Toby's Bar and Grill on Yonge street. It was a chain at the time, long gone. And in the meantime, I had a friend who went to the same high school as I did, who was a few years ahead of me who was working in the industry.

Susan Shipton:

And when I was back in Belleville, where I was living with my parents, he said, when you come to Toronto, I'm working in the business. So give me a call and I'll see what I can do. And so I did, and he was working on a show and he said, I don't know if I have anything, but you know. And I was literally in the middle of an afternoon lunch shift at Toby's with burgers in both hands. And the phone rang at Toby's. This was pre-cell phone, somehow he had my work number, I guess that's what you did. The phone rang at Toby's. And he said, and I answered it, put my burgers down. And he said, I have a job for you if you want to come and get this job. And I said, Alan, I'm like in the middle of a lunch shift at Toby's with burgers in my hands.

Susan Shipton:

I'll drive down after my shift. And he said, the job may or may not be here for you if you do that. So I actually handed my burger plates off to the other aspiring filmmaker waiter who got it. He says, Susan, give those to me. I'll never forget him. He said, give him to me, I'll take your shift. So I went down to Lake Shore Studios to pursue my first job in film. And it was as a production assistant on a soft core porn television series. I really want to emphasize that I was a production assistant, even though my first job was in pornography. And it was a for Playboy First Choice. It was called Office Girls and all the clothes had to be made with Velcro in them so that they came off quickly. One of my best friends to this day, I met on that show and I had the contract for ages and maybe I'll find it someday.

Susan Shipton:

Because it's wonderful. It's \$225 a week contracted seven day week. It's wonderful, in black and white, but I would have to, as a runner, I'd have to do everything including drive the bunnies around. But I had to drive the tapes because it was shot on tape down to Mag North, which was this editing facility, which is now a condo, a surprise in Toronto. And I would go, I would deliver them to the editor and I would, and they had jelly beans everywhere. Cause that was in the days when like tape editing was the coolest, and that's where all the money was. So they had jelly beans and cookies and stuff. And I just thought this was glorious. I would deliver these tapes and I'd sit with him in the dark room as he cut this awful stuff. Anyway, life went on after that, but that was my start.

Sarah Taylor:

So the snacks enticed you to get into the editing room?

Susan Shipton:

Large part of it.

Susan Shipton:

My friends know there's nothing I love more than free food, but it was also just that, what he was doing was really quite astonishing, even though the show was so awful, cause he, I would sit with him and he would show me what he was up against lots of this stuff that we've heard today. And he was a great editor and just the quiet, and that he was working by himself. So, yeah.

Sarah Taylor:

So then after you had that experience, you decided to pursue editing and you became an assistant.

Susan Shipton:

Yes. And that was through another crazy serendipitous Queen's connection. Woman I knew at Queen's was syncing rushes or dailies, which was an entry-level job into a cutting room in those days. And she had two jobs, and the shoot fell in such a way that she couldn't do one of the syncing jobs and phoned me. And I went in and did it. And the editor was Roger Mattiussi, who's remained a friend of mine to this day, and he kind of put me in touch to quickly just go there. I said to him; I don't know anything. I can't get into a cutting room cause I don't have a skill and he said I'll hire you. Which was lovely. And he did. He hired me on a CBC for the record where I met Sturla Gunnarsson. And then I got on a documentary as an assistant Jeff Warren and that Sturla Gunnarsson directed about the UAW, CAW, which was called Final Offer, which was an extraordinary experience because the thing about the film days is that you're actually in the room with the editor.

Susan Shipton:

So like on all of those shows, because you're just filing trims, you know? And so you're in the room with the editor sometimes in another room, but often with the editor on Final Offer, we were all at the film board and we would, I'd be standing there filing trims or sitting at the desk with the writer and the director and the editor and very much a part of the conversations if I wanted to be. And they were very generous about that. That was a fantastic experience. And through them I met Patricia Rozema. Roger was friends with Elaine Foreman who was Ron Sanders' first assistant at the time. And I said to Roger, I

really want to cut feature films. And I want to work with the best people, who are those people. And Roger named them. And he said, but there were three men.

Susan Shipton:

And he said, but two of those men don't hire women.

Sarah Taylor:

Interesting.

Susan Shipton:

I mean, it was amazing, and it was like, Roger just said it like as a statement of fact, right? Like it wasn't really, and so one of the only one who hired women was Ron. And so I went to probably an introduction through Roger. I went to Ron's cutting room and Roger had also told me, he said, he's the only editor who's doing pictures that are big enough, that'll have an apprentice on them. And that's how you're going to have to start as an apprentice. And then just to say, how I got working with Ron was I went, I met him and that was like so amazing because it's David Cronenberg's cutting room and that great picture of Cronenberg strangling himself and he's all blue.

Susan Shipton:

And it was just amazing. So, I said if you ever are hiring an apprentice, I would love to work with you. And then I get a call from his first assistant, Michael Ray they were between pictures. They said, Ron's just got a picture called The Park Is Mine, which is with Tommy Lee Jones. Would you like to come on board as a second assistant editor? And I actually freaked out because I didn't think I could do that. I'd applied to be an apprentice. And I was just sort of, Oh my God, I can't do that. So I went back home to Belleville, and I said, I'll think about it, the biggest opportunity. And I said, oh, I'll have to think about it. So I went home and my parents and my dad said to me, you didn't lie to get the job.

Susan Shipton:

You didn't tell them anything that wasn't true. They know your experienced they're willing to take you on and do it. And so I did, and I ended up then doing The Fly with Ron as well as an assistant.

Sarah Taylor:

Wow.

Susan Shipton:

And another little movie, little MOW Ron and I did as well.

Sarah Taylor:

Was there anything from your experience working with Ron that you still like look to now and when you're working?

Susan Shipton:

Yeah, absolutely. I think, I don't know. In what way, I sort of took these things in, but I even know Ron is one of my heroes as an editor. I think his editing is beautiful. And I can't even say specifically, but just

watching him cut and watching and actually weirdly Ron's own inarticulateness about what he does, what was taught me a lot, because it was all about feeling, it was like, why are you cutting there Ron? It feels right. You know, and that really is where a lot of it comes from. And he's just been hugely helpful to me. I have called him a couple of times when I'm cutting things and said, yeah, Ron, would you mind having a look and he's come in and looked and helped me over the years.

Sarah Taylor:

Wow. What a great connection.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah, it was.

Sarah Taylor:

Now, how did you get into your first opportunity from assisting to cut your first feature film?

Susan Shipton:

That was serendipity. Again, I had met Patricia Rozema at the National Film, but it's all connected. It's all these weird kinds of connections, right? I'd met Patricia we'd become friends. And I would go to her house for parties and Atom Egoyan would be there. And that's how I met Atom. And one night at a party, I wore my coat backwards, and I thought it was hysterical. I thought it was like the funniest thing ever. And everyone started wearing their coats backwards. And I don't recommend this, but people seem to remember me from that, Atom in particular.

Sarah Taylor:

Backwards coat lady.

Susan Shipton:

The backwards coat lady.

Susan Shipton:

It's sort of like, I just think it put me in his mind somehow. But what happened with The Adjuster was he was looking for an editor. Oh no. I went up for another movie. I had quite a lot of experience by this time. I'd been an assistant for nine years and I'd assisted in foley and dialogues and effects and picture and I'd cut a short film and I went up for a film and didn't get it. And the editor who got it, a man, was far less experienced than me. And he had to call me and ask me how to set up a cutting room and recognized when he was talking to me that he'd gotten the job from me. He was offered The Adjuster and he couldn't do it. And he phoned me and told me Atom's looking for an editor.

Sarah Taylor:

Nice.

Susan Shipton:

So it was kind of like, he felt bad. He didn't realize that, that was a dynamic that had happened. And so there's this weird, like theme of sexism that's worked for and against me.

Sarah Taylor:

And then did Atom go, "Oh yeah, the lady with the backwards coat."

Susan Shipton:

Yes, he did.

Sarah Taylor:

So you, you guys must've enjoyed your time working together. Cause you've cut all of his films.

Susan Shipton:

I was like the third editor, someone else was then offered *The Adjuster* and he didn't take it because Atom wanted a co-edit and I was delighted because it was a big step for me. And I thought, "Hey, I get to edit. But I have the protection a bit." I had no problem with it at all. So then when we started cutting it together, he acknowledged partway through the process we got on great. That what was actually happening was a more traditional director editor relationship. And he said to me, I'm just going to take an additional editing credit in the tails. You're the editor. And so, yeah, that started a long relationship.

Sarah Taylor:

How has that relationship evolved over the years and maybe what is it about the two of you together that just works?

Susan Shipton:

You know, it's almost a question for him in a way, but I guess what works for me is like, I've always found his films deeply moving and I'm aware that not everyone does with Atom's films, right? There's an intellectual kind of distance in some of the ways that he tells stories, but I've always been deeply moved by the characters also by the way of storytelling by his use of the camera. Like there are moments in his films that just take my breath away. So I think that I have a natural fit to those rhythms, but I'm also critical as well. So I think it's comfortable for me. I mean, the relationship has evolved, but I think the big step was his, the very first film when he recognized that I was actually an editor.

Sarah Taylor:

He trusted you.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah. And I think that from then on, we'd been on, but his filmmaking and his relationship to storytelling in the edit has really evolved.

Sarah Taylor:

You've helped make that happen too.

Susan Shipton:

Well, he does say. The one compliment he does give me is, he says, he shoots coverage because of the way I cut it, because he doesn't used to shoot coverage. He was just like, string masters together. So I like that he says that.

Sarah Taylor:

So you taught him something, that's good.

Susan Shipton:

I taught him something. Yes.

Sarah Taylor:

Was there any films, like obviously *The Sweet Hereafter* is a Canadian classic and it, is there any of his films that hold a special spot for you?

Susan Shipton:

*Felicia's Journey*. I mean, is my favourite Atom film. There are those moments in *Felicia's Journey* that are to me so beautiful and so perfectly realized. I mean, I also it's one of the more linear--I did not cut *Remember*, that was Chris Donaldson and that's a more linear one, but *Felicia's* was oddly more linear. It had its flashbacks were more conventional flashbacks versus the multi narrative, which, I'm not saying that's why I like it better, but it was different in a way. Right? And I think the discipline of actually staying in a more forward moving narrative was interesting for me. And I just, I love Bob Hoskins performance. It's an extraordinary film to me. I love it.

Sarah Taylor:

And have you recently watched it?

Susan Shipton:

Yes.

Susan Shipton:

I did, and it totally held up for me. And that doesn't always happen when I watched, previous.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah, for sure.

Susan Shipton:

Older films. Yeah.

Sarah Taylor:

Well, I think we should get into the details of your editing process. So we have a few clips that we're going to show today. Two of them are from feature films and then one television clip. And the first clip is from *Burn Your Maps* directed by Jordan Roberts. Do you want to set it up for us?

Susan Shipton:

Sure. I picked this clip because in, it's really hard on these panels I think to talk about editing and show clips, because so much of editing is about overall structure that spans whether it's a half hour of television or a feature film, right. You move stuff around, there's the flow and the pace and things. And then obviously we're not going to sit and watch all *Burn Your Maps*, but we're watching the first, I guess,

three scenes of it. And I love the film, but I picked it because I can talk about a lot of aspects of editing in it. These three scenes were reordered endlessly in the edit, just so that the first scene of the movie as scripted, you'll see when you see it, was the gymnasium. And then the next scene was the drawing. And then I don't even actually remember where the therapy session came, but it didn't come as early as it comes right now. Maybe, maybe third in, but maybe further back. I can't remember.

[Clip plays]

Susan Shipton:

So I should probably give a little backstory on what the film's about. Obviously they've lost a child six months old. I think it was a baby. The family's in crisis and Wes, the little boy thinks he's a Mongolian goat herder. So it's about identity and it's about a family in crisis and believe it or not, it's a comedy, dramatic comedy. So the scene that you saw, the last scene where he's making what you don't need to know at this point, obviously, but he's making a suit that he wears. Because he goes to school dressed as a Mongolian goat herder. So that's what he's making when he's tracing and doing all that stuff.

Susan Shipton:

In the first script and the original assembly, the way that it was shot and cut, is that slow move in and the gymnasium, is the opening of the film. And then what actually happens is that a couple of kids who bully him, pardon me, although they're not hugely important in the film, but they do bully him. They throw that book that he's making, those sketches, is they throw rolled up paper and he looks up, and he just looks at them and they insult him and leave.

Susan Shipton:

And all that. And he's looking. That's his sister in the gym, again, you don't know them. But he's looking and he's isolated, he's alone. And there's all that activity around him. So that's kind of the point of the scene and that he's also being bullied.

Susan Shipton:

But a couple of things, the bullies weren't that interesting. They're not really germane to the story they're props in terms of understanding Wes's character. They had the first line of the film. They said something awful to him. And it wasn't a great performance. So it's sort of like, "Why are we seeing these bullies"? But then the challenge became well, what's he doing? And how do we get to it? And all of that, and the director went to Mongolia. The whole film was shot in Alberta, except he went to Mongolia to get some shots.

Susan Shipton:

And that very first shot of the film is a real goat herder in Mongolia. And that kind of sound design that you hear, we came up with in the cutting room with the goats. Obviously we animated it. So you can hear it in that traditional Mongolian music in there.

Susan Shipton:

And so that very first shot of Wes that you come in on, you're supposed to feel that he's thinking that. That that's what he's thinking about. And that very first shot of Wes is actually the shot from when he looks up at the bullies. I have every single frame possible because of course he just looked back down or



whatever he did in the original performance, but because of the performance of the kid, Because he's a blank palette, so that the editing makes you think about what he's thinking about.

Susan Shipton:

So in one version we then went directly, and there's a funny story about that insert of the goats that he's drawing, I asked for that to be redone because the first time we had the insert, they look like cats or something. And so they did it again and they still look like cats. It's like one of those moments, like that doesn't look like goats. But anyway, they couldn't do it yet again. So we have him scribbling cats, which are supposed to be goats. So then we go off that. And then we went for the longest time, right to him preparing his costume. And that was a really beautiful cut. And I loved that. Because you started the music over the goat/ cat sketch and went right into his room and it was really quite beautiful and quite lyrical.

Susan Shipton:

But then the big thing about that film is that scene in the therapy office, because it is tough. It's really, really tough because the performances are really good. The subject matter is really real. It's really raw. And it's a really tough scene to put at the beginning of a comedy. The beginning of any movie, but I think at the beginning of a comedy. So that scene migrated around the first 30 minutes of the film. It just kept moving and we could never find a place for it. And the director, I can't really remember where it was scripted for us somewhere around where it actually occurs now, if not there. But as I said, it migrated. And the reason I chose this clip is because I can address lots of things about working as an editor.

Susan Shipton:

And one of them was the fact that people, namely the producers, really had a strong, adverse reaction to having that so early in the film. And we eventually realized that they had a strong or adverse reaction to a woman talking about a blow job.

Sarah Taylor:

Interesting. Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

And a woman talking the way she was talking in a therapy session. Because if you really investigated their issues, that's what it came down to. And I'm not even saying that, then that's a cultural thing, the scenes tough, but that just put it over the edge for people.

Sarah Taylor:

And it was too real maybe or something-

Susan Shipton:

They just don't want to hear women talk like that-

Sarah Taylor:

I suppose so.

Susan Shipton:

Because the evolution of the cutting of that scene, it's like I was saying to you, it's ended up pretty much uncut, right? The coverage on that scene, there was closeup coverage, there was loose AB coverage. There was lots of coverage. And the first cut of the scene, I used a lot of it, and the performances were gorgeous.

Susan Shipton:

Vera's performance to me is just like, it was just a treat. For me, editing isn't just about picking performance, but we'll come back to that. So when we had it cut on coverage, the reason why we caughtened on to the real issue around where it was, was because the producers kept asking us for the softer takes of Vera when she was saying those lines.

Susan Shipton:

And in general, softer takes of Vera, softer takes of Vera, softer takes of Vera. That was the one, probably the only note we got on that scene. And then we started going, "Mm hmm, I think we know what's going on here. It's a problem with the content".

Susan Shipton:

And the director to his credit said, "Tough". It's going early in the film. And we tested it. And I'm trying to remember what the response was. And that was like somebody was talking earlier about, "How did you respond to a test"? And I think people struggled with that scene, but the director that was part of his vision and it was going to go at the beginning and that was what he was going to do.

Sarah Taylor:

Well, I think by watching the whole film, it makes sense for it to be there. It sets it up and I didn't react like that when I heard it. I didn't think it was harsh, but I can see how that's the case. So when they asked you to do softer, softer, was that how you got to not cutting much in it? Or was it just because of some of the performance, you let those takes just-

Susan Shipton:

We recut that scene and recut it and recut it. And to be honest, the director really became, obsessed is too strong a word, with getting that scene right and getting it the way that he wanted it. And I think in a weird way, I think that there was so much good material that I think he had trouble dealing with that, honestly. Because there were just too many options. And then how we ended up at the two shot. That's one of my favorite compositions is a two shot. And the tension between the two of them is so palpable in the two shot, because you get the body language, you get the awkwardness and then you get the moment of her reaching for him at the end and crossing a bridge over. You get all that. So when you went out of that, you always had good performance, but you lost that geography.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. That chemistry. Because then even at the end, when she recoils, you-

Susan Shipton:

Oh yeah, it's tough. I mean, she allows him to come. She warms to him. But as soon as she does it, she pushes him away again. And by the way, the end of that scene, he gets up and he goes to the door, and it's beautifully written, and it was nicely performed, he basically says, "Yeah, what about me? Don't you

think I'm grieving for my child too? Just because I'm capable of going to work every day, and I'm capable of doing these things, doesn't mean I'm not grieving for my child and you're not helping".

Susan Shipton:

It was great, but it was too much. And it was super hard because it's not his film either, it's Vera's and the kid's.

Sarah Taylor:

And Wes.

Susan Shipton:

And Wes's.

Sarah Taylor:

Well, speaking of Wes, I watched the film, I thought he was wonderful. But then I was like, that has a lot to do with you too. How was it editing a young actor? I don't know. Did he have much experience? Like he's little so-

Susan Shipton:

Well, he had done Room. And I knew some people that worked on Room. It was the same thing. There's a thing with actors. And I think it's what makes some actors into movie stars. I think it's just the thing and he has it. But a lot of times, I think that's what it is with child actors. They just have a presence, a rootedness, you don't feel an artifice, they're just kind of are. And he has that. Having said that, he was tough. The first scene, real scene, where he's with Suresh in the carwash. And he meets this guy and the guy's like, "What? You think you're a Mongolian goat herder"? And he's a young filmmaker and he wants to film him. Well, Wes, Jacob Tremblay, was falling asleep through the entire scene.

Sarah Taylor:

Really.

Susan Shipton:

And it was the first scene I got. And he was literally, he'd be sitting there and he'd be going. I was cutting around like, "How many frames do I have before he closes his eyes"? It was like that. And then almost every time I'm off him-

Sarah Taylor:

It's because he's sleeping.

Susan Shipton:

He's got the noddies. And the reason for it, the director talked to him because I was like, "Ahh", the director was kind of panicked, but Jacob being a kid, he's on set and they're candies and chocolate and everything. He gorged himself and then had a sugar crash. And so the director had to say to his parents, who are great, they're great stage parents. They're hugely supportive. Had to say to his mother, like "He can't do that. He has to stay away from the craft table. And he has to go bed at a certain point".

Susan Shipton:

So there were moments when he was a kid. I mean, he's a kid. And he would get tired. But that thing that you see in his face, when he was doing well, that's what you got. And he had a big emotional scene, which unfortunately we cut out for other reasons, and he was good when he was delivering that too. So he did have it.

Sarah Taylor:

You mentioned, at one point when we were talking, that when you were cutting David Wellington's Long Day's Journey into Night, that you honed a dialogue editing technique. And I wanted to hear what that was.

Susan Shipton:

It's something that's kind of haunted me. I cut that film in 1997 and it was, in my career, aside from Adam's work, probably the most important and influential thing for me on the way that I cut. And I liked to actually think that I don't cut any particular way because I want to respond to the material and I cut in a way that's appropriate to the material. I think, like I was saying about Ron, you go in, you just, you respond to the material. It's a rhythm. It's almost a physical rhythm. It's like, "Where do you cut? You cut where it feels right".

Susan Shipton:

But editing is such a process. So that's how you arrive at say the first cut, but then when you go through it and things aren't working, then I become more analytical about why. And I pay a lot of attention, and this is a tool of analyzing more than an approach to editing, I pay a lot of attention to when dialogue scenes to where I'm cutting between characters on dialogue. And who owns the pauses, so to speak. Like, where are the pauses played and there's power in pauses.

Sarah Taylor:

Totally yeah.

Susan Shipton:

And how you play them. And again, it's not like I do it a certain way. One thing that I do, and this was, this is a bit the curse that I consciously try to rid myself of, I actually have a lot of problem creating a dialogue rhythm that isn't already there in the performance. If I have to tighten something up. Tightening something up is not a problem for me as much as loosening it.

Sarah Taylor:

Making it breathe.

Susan Shipton:

Making it breathe, because if the actors didn't do it, I find it hard to cut outside of their rhythms. Which is not necessarily a good thing. I'm not saying that it is, that's why it's kind of a curse.

Sarah Taylor:

Is it because you've watched that footage and you feel connected to that footage? Or why do you feel like it's not right?

Susan Shipton:

I don't know why really, because I think, I think it comes from Long Days Journey into Night, which was a stage play and the actors had done it in Stratford, and they were well rehearsed in it. And they did dialogue over. They did some overlapping and stuff like that, but I would actually cut the dialogue tracks and fit the picture in.

Sarah Taylor:

Okay.

Susan Shipton:

And I will still do that. I mean, it's, it's interesting because, in reality, people were talking about doing a similar thing.

Sarah Taylor:

The radio edit.

Susan Shipton:

And, I will do that, but I do find sometimes it's hard. That's the challenge for me. I find it hard to cut out any of the rhythms and the natural things that people do with their faces. And when they're speaking to one another. But editing is a process, so I can do it much more easily on the second cut.

Susan Shipton:

On the first cut, they have all those moments and those are all in there. And then I can go through. I think because Long Day's Journey was such a dialogue heavy film. And I really, really had so much opportunity to really look at the effect you have, for instance, when you cut in the middle of a clause versus between clauses. When you lay a word over or where you pre-lap, and there's no right or wrong thing to do about that, it's just paying attention to the impact that had on the story, the emotional story you were telling.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. And you mentioned that you pay attention to the pauses. What is it about the pause? What do you look for? Is it a feeling? Or is it the expression? Or just a natural rhythm?

Susan Shipton:

The actors that I find the hardest to cut are the ones that do a whole lot of things before their reaction. Because you're going to cut it out, it's just too long. But then I find that there's an emotional transition missing. This is another thing that I'm really big on when I'm cutting dialogue, is emotional transitions. In other words, if you're on somebody and they're angry or they're about to cry, and you cut away a couple of places and you come back and that person is in tears, it makes it look like it's bad editing.

Sarah Taylor:

You lose it. Yeah. You lose that emotion.

Susan Shipton:

And that's one of the huge challenges because maybe it took that person way too long to start to cry.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah, totally. Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

So now what do you do? Now you figure out a way when something's not working for me again, I look at it and I say, "Do I have the emotional transitions"? And frankly, sometimes you can't. Like in Guest of Honour, in fact, there's this incredible performance by David Thewlis. And we just went with it. It's just one shot of him. It's beautiful. And a lot of it, I think was ad-libbed, but it was too long. It's already three minutes. We just stay in his face for three minutes and it was six or something before. So we had cut out the beginning of it. And I don't know if anybody else will feel it. Now you'll all look for it.

Sarah Taylor:

We're all going to look for it.

Susan Shipton:

But when we cut away from him, we come back, I feel that loss of a little emotional transition. And I tried to fix it with a breath and some sound effects and stuff, but stuff like that makes me crazy.

Sarah Taylor:

I love it. Let's talk a little bit about performance. And you say it's not all about performance always, but it is in the rhythm and that side of editing for you.

Susan Shipton:

Well, it's funny because I often hear editors say, "It's all about performance. It's all about performance", and yeah, of course, it is. These are great performances, but that's not the only reason why that's that scene is played mostly on a two-shot. It's played mostly on a two shot because we would have lost the physicality between them to do it otherwise. There's another cut of that scene, that's good. And arguably, I kind of wish I'd been able to bring it, you could say, "Yeah, it's better".

Sarah Taylor:

There's more dynamics or something.

Susan Shipton:

Whatever. There's no one perfect way to cut a scene. But editing is a craft as much as an art, or an instinct. And you use what's given you. And that's composition, shot composition, sound, pace. In some scenes, actually in the one that we'll see in the dinner scene, this is another thing that we'll all often do, not just me, is I will cut to somebody two or three cuts before I really need them. Because that's going to set up that reaction, right?

Susan Shipton:

If you're on, somebody, like in this dinner scene we see, he's just sitting there like this. I'm setting that up for when he talks. Because he's like a time bomb. So again, if I want to see that emotional transition, then I've got to go to that person before I really need to. So well, "Why am I going to him"? Well, there's craft involved there, right?

Susan Shipton:

And I think the same thing with performance. There are some good performances and great performances in films I've cut that are on the cutting room floor. They have to be. I have an hour worth of dailies, not every great performance is in the cut. And I may say, I'm on a wide shot here, even though the performance is in the close, I'm on a wide shot here, because if I go in close, I just don't have any gas left by the end of the scene.

Susan Shipton:

And I absolutely think as much, maybe I'll never work again after I say this, but I think as much about shot size and composition as I do about performance. It's film.

Sarah Taylor:

In a lot of the films you work on, you have really great actors who give you a lot of really great performance too, so that helps right.

Susan Shipton:

Having said that it, I'm not going to use a bad performance. But it's one of the things that I consider. Because otherwise, I think, yeah-

Sarah Taylor:

Well then all the parts come together. That's the joy of filmmaking. It's not just about that great actor or that great cinematographer, and we all collaborate and make it good.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah.

Sarah Taylor:

You touched on the scene, we're going to see it's a dinner scene from the film, Barney's Version directed by Richard J. Lewis. Maybe tell us a little bit about the film.

Susan Shipton:

So this is based on Mordecai Richler's book, Paul Giamatti plays Barney Panofsky and his father is played by Dustin Hoffman. And his father is a tough cop. And Minnie Driver plays the woman that Paul Giamatti has met and asked her to marry him. And she comes from a very wealthy family. So, Izzy who's, Dustin Hoffman, is like a ticking time bomb in the scene because you just wonder when he's going to really embarrass himself.

Sarah Taylor:

It's so good.

Susan Shipton:

The challenge in cutting this was, for me, aside from the comedy of it, was to keep the relationships alive. Because Barney, Paul Giamatti, loves his father. He loves him to death. They have a really strong relationship. He knows he's rough around the edges and all of that. And Paul Giamatti is such an extraordinary actor that what he's able to bring to it is, he's a little worried how this is going to go. But there's also a protectiveness about his father. So I wanted to bring that in. And Dustin's character just is what it is. But I wanted to try and bring in Barney's response to all this.

Susan Shipton:

But the real reason why I picked this was not because it's comedy, but I picked it because it's a dinner table scene. And I just find those so hard to cut. They fall under the category. I've actually picked an action sequence for the last thing. And it's in the same category for me, which is, scenes in which many things happen at once. Ay yai yai. They're so hard. And I think directors find them hard to shoot those kind of things. And everyone's isolated, except they're not isolated completely because there's continuity issues, especially with Dustin Hoffman on this. And then there's eye-line issues.

Susan Shipton:

And so I picked it because I find them really hard because you want to get to everybody, but you don't want it to be cutty. And so I picked it for that reason. And the other two reasons I picked it is, it pauses, it's playing pauses, setting up jokes as well, setting up moments. And lastly, I picked it because I think it's about stardom because when I first saw the dailies, this is Dustin Hoffman's introduction into the movie, and when I first saw the dailies, I thought, "Really"? In a big theater, that's quite a wide shot.

Susan Shipton:

You can't even recognize that it's Dustin. And so I thought, "Really that's Izzy? Dustin Hoffman's character introduction"? And then I saw the door open, I thought, "Oh, that's where I'll start". And then I actually went to the door open in one cut and it was way too tight and I was kind of worried about it. Not that I wanted, a drum roll or anything, but I wanted something more than a generic wide shot of a mansion. But we screened the film in L.A. at a test screening, and Dustin Hoffman got two words out of his mouth, and everybody knew who he was. And they laughed before he finished his line. I actually think it's a perfect way to start the scene anyway now. But I thought that was so interesting to watch that.

Sarah Taylor:

You're like, "Okay, I don't have to worry about that anymore".

Susan Shipton:

That whole audience just rock for an American legend, basically, as an actor.

Sarah Taylor:

Well, let's, let's watch this clip. It's Barney's Version.

[Clip plays]



Sarah Taylor:

So great. And I even, I felt awkward watching the moment where you're like, Ooh, okay, that's good.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah. The thing that I remember most about cutting that scene, it was really, really tough to cut. All the editors in the room will recognize all the continuity potential there to try and build all those moments. Dustin Hoffman did not know his lines, so they were different every time. There were more lines in the scene than... But the scene was just too long, so it had to be cut down. All the usual stuff that we deal with. But the thing that I'm proudest of probably is the opening with him, with his fork. Cause that's the first thing you have to do as an editor is decide how to start. And I find that the hardest thing. And I saw that in dailies and I thought that's the beginning of the scene. And it's before cut, or before action.

Sarah Taylor:

Oh, he's just playing.

Susan Shipton:

Well, he's just getting ready. And I just was... And I thought, just keep doing it. It's so great. So I took every moment of it. And then I had to put a sound effect in, cause people were talking over it, and I amp the sound effect, which ended up being in the case just cause, and then I went back, I thought that's just, I got to try a few other things. And I started on the wide, because there's an incredible tension on the wide you come in the room, they're all sitting there. But I ended up back with the fork. Cause it's everything.

Sarah Taylor:

It's really sets up his character.

Susan Shipton:

It totally sets up his character. And that was Dustin. I don't think he was directed and he didn't do it every take, but he did it once, so I got it.

Sarah Taylor:

But you saw it and you felt it, and you snatched it up.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah.

Sarah Taylor:

That's great. Anything else about that that back and forth?

Susan Shipton:

All the editors know it's really hard to talk about what's not there, which is the work, right?

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

But I think it... I don't know when I'm looking at, I just, again, it is, the performances really are beautiful. They gave me all that stuff that we were looking for because... I mean probably Dustin Hoffman less so because he's just being Izzy, he's just being kind of outrageous. And although, he's this lovely, lovely moment where he goes back at Minnie Driver's father, but then he saves it, which is such a great character moment for him. He gets up and he gives the toast. It's a scene that just kind of goes like this, and I just really like it.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. When you were working on films with people like Dustin Hoffman and Paul Giamatti, do you have, when you're first looking at dailies, are you the young you who started, PAing in the industry scene? Well, now I'm cutting these big names. Do you have any star struck moments or are you just like, no, we're going to tell this story and we're in it and-

Susan Shipton:

Oh totally completely star struck by Dustin Hoffman. Oh my God. One of the films that was my favorite film of my life was a Little Big Man. And, I love Dustin Hoffman. He was... And when I got this, I thought I can't... I'm cutting a Dustin Hoffman movie? The pinch me moment, for sure. And Paul Giamatti. And there's another scene in Barney's Version, which is a dialogue between the two of them. And it's really beautiful. It's really, really beautiful. But Paul Giamatti I think affected me more than anybody because he is such a great actor. Yeah.

Sarah Taylor:

When you came on to, maybe we'll talk about this film specifically or whichever film you want, are you coming in, the scripts already written and done and your... They're about to shoot? What... Do you get to put input on the script side of things? Where does your creative component start?

Susan Shipton:

Well it depends. I get, when I work with Atom, he has sort of layers of people he gives the script to at different stages, and I'm one of the early ones. So, I read his scripts quite early and give him input and then he will give them out. Cause he recognizes that people at a certain point, you're not fresh anymore. Right?

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah, for sure.

Susan Shipton:

So I usually see early drafts of his. With Barney's I saw... It's produced by Robert Lantos and I was doing a lot of films with him at the time, so I saw a fairly early draft of that. And just, in terms of what I'm looking for in a script that I know is going to be challenging, and Barney's Version was a great example of it, is subplots.

Susan Shipton:

And, Barney's Version is a difficult book to adapt. The script was beautiful. Oh, this was another thing. The script was beautiful, beautiful script. It was 130 pages long. Right away, it should have been 110,

100. And they wanted to film around 110 minutes. And I said, Robert, you know, and he said, we'll cut it down in the edit, Susan. And I should never have let him get away with that because that's like you create a three legged table. Right? And the heartbreaking thing for me and Barney's Version that I talked about killing children, I killed some children. It was awful. And it also left some of the kids that were alive, maimed,

Sarah Taylor:

Oh no. Those poor kids.

Susan Shipton:

And that, and I hate that. And I said that to the director and he said, well, Susan, I'm so glad to hear you say that. I really didn't think it bothered you. I'm like, of course it bothered me. Here's an example, there's this whole... There are three marriages in the film. Right? And there's... The first one was the one that suffered the most. And just because we... Test audiences all said it was too long. And they were right. So it had to be cut down. So, the first marriage, she's frightened of storms, and there's a big storm and he's comforting her when they're first married, he's comforting her cause she's scared. And he says, here have a banana, eat a banana, you'll feel better, you haven't eaten. And so she eats it and she peels it from the wrong end. And he says, why you peel it that way, and she said, I don't know, I read somewhere that monkeys do it. And so that's, I figured, they'd know. And it's kind of funny and it's lovely, right? It had to go.

Susan Shipton:

But in the end of the movie, Dustin Hoffman is handed a... Or Paul Giamatti, who has Alzheimer's, is handed a banana. And he turns it around to be the way that she told him. And it's so, and I love it when stuff is planted in a script that then pays off. Right? So it broke my heart that that set up for that. Now it plays. Cause you just think he doesn't know... He has Alzheimer's, and he's struggling-

Sarah Taylor:

He forgot about bananas.

Susan Shipton:

With how to eat a banana. But it had so much more resonance. And there are a lot of moments in Barney's that suffered that fate from my evil editing hands.

Sarah Taylor:

How dare you.

Susan Shipton:

How dare I.

Sarah Taylor:

When you're in that situation where you're looking at this script and you're seeing all these subplots and can you, do you say, yeah you got to ditch it?

Susan Shipton:

Yes. People need to tell the stories they need to tell. I think that the method of storytelling through limited series is much more liberating. I mean, I love feature films and I love the big screen, but the subplots, for instance, in Barney's Version would not have been a problem in even a four-part mini series. Right? So, I mean I think that's a good thing. I mean, Robert Lantos made a film years ago, a Hungarian film, I can't remember the name of it now. It was so long. And I remember, I didn't cut it, I remember seeing the hour and a half version that they cut it down to. And one of the sound editors on it told me the three hour version was way better. And, but they couldn't go. Right? And, so that's a film as well that would have benefited by a longer format. So.

Sarah Taylor:

We're going to kind of shift gears a bit. Over your career, you've worked on many different types of editing systems. Steenbeck, Moviola. Did you say K-E-M or KEM? I don't remember that one.

Susan Shipton:

KEM.

Sarah Taylor:

Pic Sync, Avid, Lightworks. I'm sure there's many others. And I feel like even now, and the technology we're in now, the systems are changing at a fast pace, and we're almost chasing the technology. So, how do you approach this? Or what are your thoughts on how we are always having to do the next thing and or adding more to what the editor's role is in the edit suite.

Susan Shipton:

It's changed so much in the last 10 years that, when I was, I cut on a Moviola, I cut KEM, we cut The Adjuster on a Cinemata, which is an old Italian editing machine that they were using 40 years before me. Right? You're lucky if you're cutting on the same software four weeks from now. Right? I mean, imagine that I was actually, when I started, cutting on the same... In the same way that editors started cutting on. Right? And it was, I'm not that old, it was like a while later. So the changes that have occurred in the last 10 years, and certainly we're not the only people in the world experiencing this. And I say 10 years, because it's really 20, but the incredible fast paced change to me has happened in the last 10 years.

Susan Shipton:

And as I said, we're not the only ones. This is the world that we're... The great promise of technology was it was going to give us more tools and a better life. And it's definitely given us more tools, but it's also made... Increased the workload hugely. And it's my concern about editors is I feel like we have a lot of skills, but I also, and it's great, it's a matter of balance really, because my concern is that we're being turned into generalists. That we are having to acquire so many skills at such a high level, because a skill with music, a skill with sound, a skill with writing, those are all talents that we've all always had to have because it's part of storytelling. But I think the level at which we're required to execute and perform all of those roles, I think it's worthy of a lot of thought and a lot of reflection and a lot of discussion.

Susan Shipton:

I don't know how you initiate that. And I don't know how you approach it because as I said, we are not the only ones experiencing this in the world, but in the film industry, I think we experience it at a higher level than other departments. I think probably the department next to us who experiences these

changes as profoundly as us would be the art department. But, how do you find a balance saying I can put some music on this, to I'm doing 40 to 50% of the composer's work.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. I'm doing all of the sound designing, I'm yeah.

Susan Shipton:

And listen, it's not going to become less because the technology is only going to allow us to do more. And I guess I think the other thing that concerns me is yes, we do music, yes we do sound, yes we do color timing.

Susan Shipton:

But we're not composers, we're not sound editors, we're not colors, and we're not seen to be. Right? So, when we do those roles, I don't think they get the same acknowledgement financially, monetarily they don't, as they do when the real people come and do them.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

And, I'm not... I don't want to be seen as resistant because technology does allow you to play with those things. It's just going forward, it's just your use of words is really apt I think, is, are we making the technology work for us or are we running behind it trying to keep up all the time?

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

And I think there's a bit too much of the latter and less of the former.

Sarah Taylor:

And then do we lose some of what our skill is, which is telling the story and helping shape the story. Because now we have to make sure, okay, we got to fit an extra, however many hours today to make sure the color is all good so that whoever looks at our cut is not upset or... So yeah, it's a discussion, when do we stop? And then also I feel like sound design and color grading and composing, those are all elements that make the film better, that enhance our performance, and enhance what's there. And if some of that's being taken away, then we're losing some of that art.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah. I mean, I really think, as I said, a supervising editor, had a lot of control and a lot of input over all of those elements, and as in the beginnings of the technology, when we first started working on Avid, there seemed to be a little bit more of a balance. It was like, ah, great, we can put some music on here, great. We can smooth these soundtracks. And now it's like, you could broadcast this stuff out of an Avid, or there's that expectation, you can't... There's that expectation. And I... The picture editors that I know,

when we get together and talk, we either talk about the latest technology, or mostly they talk about storytelling.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

Picture editors see themselves as storytellers. That's what gets them going. That's what interests them, us. And I think to diversify so greatly is a disservice to that talent.

Sarah Taylor:

I agree.

Susan Shipton:

You know?

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

I don't know what the hell you do with that, but.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. Next year. We'll talk about it next year.

Susan Shipton:

I mean, I do have some ideas.

Sarah Taylor:

Well, you can share.

Susan Shipton:

Well, I mean, I think that using the technology to more efficiently and in a more sophisticated manner bring the departments together.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

That's what I would say. I totally get why a composer doesn't want to do a temp track. Listen, I wouldn't either. It's a different part of the brain, right, if I were them. But I do think that, why is the music department-

Sarah Taylor:

They're not there.

Susan Shipton:

Not more involved? Why has that become us so exclusively? When did that happen? I missed that part. Right? And I know why, because they're not on generally - on most things I work on - they're not paid to be on till later. Well is there a way to bring them on sooner? And yeah, we'll have that conversation, we'll put it on. But involve people earlier.

Sarah Taylor:

Bring it back to that collaboration.

Susan Shipton:

I'm really afraid that people don't know how to look at cuts anymore without them sounding like they're ready for a TV and that's that ain't going to change either.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. Well, speaking of TV.

Susan Shipton:

Yep.

Sarah Taylor:

Yep. You've worked a lot in the television realm, and the process is different. You got your time constraints with the actual time that is being broadcast, the time constraints with the schedule, keeping the arc of your series. So let's touch a little bit about the process that you take going into a television cut, and then we'll show our TV clip after that.

Susan Shipton:

The process is the same for me. Well, no, it's different. On a feature, I have more time. My process on a feature is to look at the dailies and make notes and find those bits that I like. But, given, as I said, that I also cut with composition and rhythm in mind just as much, I do still make notes, obviously of that's a great moment, that's a great moment. But television is different primarily because there's a lot more footage, right? Or I should say, if there is a lot more, then I have a different approach, whether it's a feature or television. I don't have the time or the attention span, frankly, to look at three hours of dailies and make detailed notes.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

I think that's great if people do, honestly, I do, I'm not being flip, I do, but I don't. So what I feel I'm obliged to do is make sure that by the time I've got that scene in the first assembly, I've looked at all the dailies.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

So what I'll do is I'll take... I'll kind of scroll through them. I'll look carefully at the selected takes, the last two, and drop them in and get a structure. Cause also and every editor is different for me, psychologically looking at dailies and a completely uncut scene is really difficult. I need to... I'm much better and much happier when I have something.

Sarah Taylor:

Something it's daunting if it's--

Susan Shipton:

Exactly. And I know some editors are really meticulous and that's the way they work, but I need something. So I'll get that together as quickly as possible. In fact, I have a word for it. I call them slappers.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah.

Susan Shipton:

And I'll slap it together as quickly as possible, cause I know that at, on every cut, every choice I've made, I'm going to go back in and look at the dailies and recut.

Sarah Taylor:

You make me feel really good right now. Cause I used to feel guilty that I didn't sit there for five hours and watch all the footage, cause I'm the same way, I want to put it down. You're still going to watch it all, but you need to do something.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah. I got over the guilt a long time ago.

Sarah Taylor:

I'm going to take... I'm going to throw that away now. Thank you very much.

Susan Shipton:

I'm not sure that this way of working is more efficient, however.

Sarah Taylor:

Well maybe I won't then.

Susan Shipton:

I'm not sure, I'm not promoting it as a way of working. It's just for me mentally, I have to have something to work from.

Sarah Taylor:



Typically when you're on a series, how many episodes are you cutting? Are you coming in at the beginning? Are you getting your scripts ahead of time? How does that kind of work for you?

Susan Shipton:

Unless I'm cutting the very first one, I don't necessarily get scripts cause they're still writing them on TV. Right?

Sarah Taylor:

Okay.

Susan Shipton:

The Book of Negroes was different cause that was a limited series and it was a passion piece by Clement. And I did get episodes one and two, I think early on, with time to give input. Too long. Killed us. But generally, no, I don't get a script until a couple of days before or whatever. And I would do, on a 10 part series, do two or three episodes. I usually do about two or three, depending on the length of the series.

Sarah Taylor:

Okay. Well we have a clip from The Expanse. Do you want to set it up?

Susan Shipton:

Yeah, this is like the dinner scene weirdly. It's an action scene totally, and couldn't be more unlike the dinner scene, but like it because it's lots of things happening at once scene. I found this so challenging to cut the scene. Oddly, it's directed by an editor, because literally everything happened at once. There's... I don't really remember what's happening except that our heroes are in the outfits, and in the uniforms, you know them from The Expanse, if you know the show, and the bad guys are coming in the back. So the hotel desk is here, the bad guys are coming in the back. They're also coming in behind them. And that all happens at once. And gun things happen.

Sarah Taylor:

And the biggest challenge I had was the geography, right? In order for there to be any real stakes that our heroes are going to get shot, you have to know who's going to shoot at them and create that tension. And there's lots of eyes going around like this, right? But because it all happened at once and they were in one another's shots, it was super hard to find the air in there, to put it together because it was... I mean, all the editors know what I'm talking about. What I find, and it's funny, I watched it again for this clip and what I'll tell you what bothers me about it, but.

Sarah Taylor:

Let's watch it, the last one.

[Clip plays]

Sarah Taylor:

There's a lot happening.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah. Yeah. There's a lot happening. I mean, the thing that bothers me about the scene but it doesn't bother me a lot, because I know I tried to fix it, is I need a master out there more often than I had, because to set the geography. I think, and I just didn't have it, because literally everything ... There was a master shooting that way and a master shooting back that way. I had them, but I've used it every single place I can to help with the geography. But that was my frustration about that scene. And it's funny, because there was a fair amount of footage, but somebody was talking about it earlier, and my expression is, there's less here than meets the eye. Once you get into it and you realize, oh, there really is only so many shots of Amos doing this, or so many shots of the couch, whatever, it starts to get smaller than it first appears. Which is also why, psychologically, I think I like to get a cut, because then in doing that, I'm also getting to know the dailies as well. But what I love about this scene is the music.

Sarah Taylor:

That was my favourite part.

Susan Shipton:

And that was... We had a music supervisor on that. So, that's an old hotel lobby, right? And it's got all these Caribbean kind of things, so I asked the music supervisor, "So can you give me some cheesy lobby music that would be in a Caribbean kind of thing?" And so, she sent like five or six choices and I picked that one. And then everyone said, "Oh, you have to put music on, you have to put music on when the gunfight starts."

Sarah Taylor:

No.

Susan Shipton:

Well, they made me put music on, because I was like, why? There are guns going. That just is like, I heard this expression the other day, a hat on a hat. Why would I do that? And it was hard. So, I went and I tried. I got it from a John Carpenter soundtrack, and I put this music on it. And then the showrunner, who's a brilliant showrunner, he's like, get the music off it. It's just going to be so funny when that gunfight goes and then dee de dee at the end. So, I liked that those decisions were made the way that they were made. And the zip and stuff. I would have put that in the first cut, Amos's zip sound. And there were a couple of other sound effects, not many.

Susan Shipton:

And "The Expanse" was a fun show, because we had comp artists. So, those visual effects that you see of the tablet and stuff, I would have had those not right away to work with, but fairly early to work with as comps, or as temps before they were actually done by the vis effects people.

Sarah Taylor:

How long would a scene like that take to do your assembly?

Susan Shipton:

I don't even know how long it would have taken me to do that, because I nibbled at it.

Sarah Taylor:

Right. Yeah. It's a big one.

Susan Shipton:

I nibbled that one. Yeah. I would've slapped and nibbled it.

Sarah Taylor:

That's good. When you're in the throes of an edit, whether it's a feature or a series that has a tight schedule, what do you do to make sure that you stay sane or healthy?

Susan Shipton:

Assuming I'm sane. That's a huge leap. I think I actually like writing, and I work on short film ideas and stuff like that. But except for that, I do things that are as unrelated as possible to being in an editing room. I get outside as much as I possibly can. That's just what I like to do. Play with my dog, gardening. Anybody who's on Facebook with me sees endless pictures of my dog. But that's just a totally separate thing. So, I think it's whatever a person enjoys in life, you just try and do as much of that as possible. I don't know.

Sarah Taylor:

Make sure that you still have a life out of the edit suite.

Susan Shipton:

But by the way, I think these hours that this panel was talking about in reality is just...

Sarah Taylor:

It's long.

Susan Shipton:

It's horrible. I just think that's horrific.

Sarah Taylor:

Let's make that stop.

Susan Shipton:

I have such a problem with that. And I think it is symptomatic of what happens when you're expected to do far too many things. Because if you're going to be expected to do all those things, you need more time. People are making a lot of money out of those shows. Anyway. Get off the soap box, Susan.

Susan Shipton:

No, I find that deeply upsetting. I do not work those hours. I don't. First of all, I don't. I mean, I'm working a show right now where the hours are tougher than I've ever experienced. I'm out the door by seven at the latest, usually. I'm happy to work later if it's required, but a lot of times I'll leave at six. Now, "Barney's Version", we worked pretty late. But generally, I don't think that long hours are necessary in editing, and I don't think they're beneficial. My brain is fried.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah, I agree.

Susan Shipton:

We're working on computers.

Sarah Taylor:

Eventually you're just sitting there wasting time. You're not doing anything.

Susan Shipton:

Well, I compare it to writing. And I know there are writers that work long hours, but not very many of them. Because on set, it's a lot of... And I don't think they should be working the hours they're working either. But it's a lot of hurry up and wait. Whereas in editing, if you're sitting in front of an Avid, you're editing, right? Unless you go to the bathroom, you're editing. So, you know, yeah.

Sarah Taylor:

Yeah. This is our last question before the Q and A. What do you hate to hear from directors, showrunners and other editors?

Susan Shipton:

The thing that is bugging me right now is when people say "don't cut, line cut." Don't... I don't want to be in this edit on everybody when they're speaking. It falls in the category to me of, that's not a direction to an editor. What do you want to see? You know, and it's about saying I'm not a certain kind of editor, whatever that is. It's about saying I'm not a bad editor. So, as soon as somebody says that to me, it's like saying, please don't be a bad editor. Okay. You know, I just, I don't like directions that aren't useful, that aren't really about storytelling, right? And don't, I mean, I'll cut every single line on a character when they're talking if it works. Or not, it doesn't usually work, but you know, or not, right? Another favourite, unfavourite direction is "just fuck it up a bit".

Sarah Taylor:

What does that even mean?

Susan Shipton:

I know, a showrunner says that, I want to say, "How much do you get paid a year to tell me, to come up with that direction?" So, I don't like that. I'm not particularly fond of "just have fun" either, because these are all things that I've heard, and they aren't directions. Now, having said that, sometimes you get a problematic scene and no one quite knows what to do with it. And they say, you know what? I worked years ago on a really bad children's MOW and the director was a sweetheart and a very good director. And he was stuck with bad performances and his schedule and dah, dah, dah, dah. And he said to me, he said, "Susan, don't ever say I said this, but just cut a lot, okay? It's going to help." And he was right. We just went in and when in trouble go fast, we cut a lot and I let him get away with that, because he was super smart when we were in trouble. But as a general kind of direction to editors of, you know, "just fuck it up", not so much.

Sarah Taylor:

Or insert funky montage.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah. Oh, that's another thing that bugs me, is no one shoots montages anymore, but they ask you to cut them all the time. What's up with that?

Sarah Taylor:

You got all the footage. What are you talking about?

Susan Shipton:

Just make it a montage. Okay. Just because the director didn't make it a montage.

Sarah Taylor:

On that note, let's open it up to the audience for any questions.

Audience Question:

Hi. I was having an interesting conversation with a colleague of mine last week, about how filmmakers that don't have lives make films about making films. And I think that you kind of touched on that when you were saying like, you should get outside and walk your dog or whatever. How does who you are colour your work, and how do you put your own little signature on things? What would you say your signature is?

Susan Shipton:

I really hope I don't put a signature on my work, actually. Yeah. I feel pretty strongly about not putting my signature on my work. What I want my work to be is good, you know? And I think good editing serves the drama. I want, and I'm not saying I am, but I would want to be a person who can cut different genres, different types of films and adapt my so-called style to that. And that's hard. It's challenging, right? To do that. And I'm not saying I'm successful at it, but I think that would be a goal, I'd like to...

Susan Shipton:

This sounds terribly arrogant, and I don't mean it about me, but I think the goal would be to be a good editor and have people say the style is good editing versus... And it kind of connects with what we were just talking about, is like laying a style or an approach over a project. I think when you go into something and you want people to feel you, that's what happens. I want the story to be served. And sometimes the editing can be quite self-conscious to serve that, for sure. But it needs to serve the story.

Audience Question:

You were talking earlier about the amount of work that editors have to do and if other people were coming in earlier, and it reminded me of something I heard about "Joker", where the composer wrote something, shared it with the director, the director shared it with Joaquin Phoenix, and that's how he came up with that dance that he does in the bathroom, I don't know if you've seen it, which is extraordinary. And so, it made me wonder about all of this technological change that we're going through, and we're still dealing with an industry that's based on 20th century workflows. Do you see anything when you look into the future about how we might work better or different?

Susan Shipton:

I think that that's possible and desirable, for sure. I don't have, I'm not a technological innovator, so I don't have that vision, but I sure hope there are people working and thinking about that, because you're talking about "Joker". It's budget, because on bigger films like that, for sure they've got the composer involved earlier, for sure, right? And on some television series, even lower budget Canadian television series, I know producers do that. I think that what's happened, and I wouldn't say it's our fault, but we've allowed it for it's just happened, is that we have taken all of that on and it becomes increasingly difficult to divest yourself of those increased responsibilities as we go along. And I don't know. And again, I'm not resistant to working with being able to take advantage of the tools we have and work with music and sound and all of that. It's just a balance.

Susan Shipton:

And the other thing, I think it's a terrible disservice to composers, because they bring something quite unique. And I've been around long enough, I remember when they hated temp tracks and they didn't want to see stuff with temp tracks on it. Now, they're kind of addicted to them, I think, for the most part. That was another one of my things I hate. I hate it when composers complain about temp tracks in a demeaning manner, because they're a hell of a lot of work. And I think picture editors are taking a lot of the bullets. We're trying this stuff. It used to be the composer that would have to try that stuff. And no, no, no, that doesn't work.

Susan Shipton:

So, it's just, it's the balance. So, I think it's a good question, and I think it's where a lot of discussions should be going, because it can, the technology is not working as well. It's not just a matter of lifestyle, but though, I think that's hugely important. It's also are we pulling all the best creative energy into a project through our use of technology? And I don't think so yet. And I think the wrong people are probably controlling it, right? Wrong in that they don't have that as their modus operandi when they're developing technology and selling it. Be great if that's what's their biggest concern is, amalgamating stuff and workflow and quality of life, but that's not.

Audience Question:

Have you done any directing?

Susan Shipton:

Yes. I directed a short film many years ago, and that was, it's something that I would like to do, so hopefully I'll be able to do it again. I came second in the DGC short film funding contest. Second was nothing. I know.

Sarah Taylor:

Try again, that's what they say.

Susan Shipton:

I will try again.

Audience Question:

Hi, first off, thank you very much for the panel. It's been great. I just, curious question, but is there any kind of uncharted territory in terms of editing that you're looking to explore maybe? Just out of curiosity.

Susan Shipton:

Oh, that's a good question. I hadn't really thought about it, actually. There's always... "The Expense" was a big one for me, because I'd never done that kind of work before. You know what I would really like to do? I would really, and it's probably never going to happen for me, but I would love to work with a team of editors on something. I love, and it's one of the things I really love about television, is I really love working with other editors, and depending on those people and the project, I love walking down the hall and going, "Can you look at this?" And I just think that would be so exciting to do that, to work on a big show, a big movie with other editors. Yeah,

Susan Shipton:

I did it once on a film called "Mr. Nobody", and we had two editors. I was the second editor. The first editor was a Belgian, because it was a co-pro and blah, blah, blah. Anyway, he was the lead editor, but the director and the lead editor taught at the Belgian film school. And they were always, they were inviting their film students all the time to come and cut. It was a riot. I was sitting cutting away, and this young woman comes to my door and says, "I've got a cut of that scene, if you'd like it." But it was so fun to have them around and to, I don't know, so that I'd like to do, but I don't know if that's going to happen.

Audience Question:

Thank you for the talk and sharing information. I have a question about Atom Egoyan's approach to filmmaking, and you mentioned this earlier, there's an intellectual distance, and yet you wanted to bring out the emotional impact of this story. And so, how do you find balancing the two? Or do you... I guess I'll leave it at that. How do you find balancing the intellectual distance of his approach with getting the emotional pull, if that makes sense?

Susan Shipton:

Yeah, it does make sense. Hm. That's a good question. I think I just keep responding to the material the way I respond, and it probably is on a more emotional level. And as I said, I do find a lot of his, a lot of the performances, a lot of the characters deeply moving, right? And I think he does too. It's just that Atom... Atom... As an intellectual construct on his work, he's always felt uncomfortable manipulating people. I remember that from the very first job interview I had when I did "The Adjuster". We're sitting at the Amsterdam having beer, I'll never forget it. And I read the script, and every time the scene got to the emotional part or got to a build, he cut away, right?

Susan Shipton:

And I asked him about that. I said, "I just kind of feel like you can squeeze a couple of those together, because we go here and then we go somewhere else and we come back to that scene, but we'd been somewhere else, so by the time we came back". And he, and I still remember he said to me, "I just, I'm so uncomfortable manipulating people's emotions, right?" And that's where he comes from as an artist. So, on some level, but he's also like, I know he comes from an emotional place too, because it's there and I connect to it, right? So, I think it's... I don't know if that answers it. He has a whole crazy way of working we could talk about too.

Sarah Taylor:

Maybe a whole other panel.

Susan Shipton:

Yeah.

Audience Question:

I was just wondering how you deal with theme and subtext in a film, second layer stuff, second level stuff. If the film is, the plot is about one thing, but the theme and the subtext that the director is trying to get across is something else. Or it's... I don't know if I'm articulating this properly, but do you feel there's a tension between the two when you're editing and you have to balance the two?

Susan Shipton:

I don't think, no, I don't, because theme and subtext is not my wheelhouse. I'm all about what's in front of me on the screen. And I'm all about how the drama is playing out emotionally, and the overall structure, how we can tell the story, right? And whatever kind of thematic construct someone places on it, or a critical interpretation of it later, is for them. Because, and it kind of speaks a bit to the question the other gentleman had too, about the theory versus the emotion. You're always, always telling a story, always. And the story may be a person getting up and walking across the room. That's a three part story. They got up, they walked across the room and they left. So, the broader... It always fascinates me when I hear people talk about the writing of a piece, right? And they talk about all those kinds of things you were saying. I'm like, "Oh, really?" I just thought she should be crying then, because he said something that upset her. So, you know...

Sarah Taylor:

That's great.

Audience Question:

I'm just wondering, what do you like those director and how did director communicate with you? I mean, in the positive way. We know what we don't like about what kind of director, but what do you like about, and...

Sarah Taylor:

That's a good one.

Susan Shipton:

That's such a great question. Thank you for answering that, otherwise we'd be on the record with my gripes.

Sarah Taylor:

Like, oh, she's cranky again.

Susan Shipton:

I only had three little ones.

Sarah Taylor:

I'm just teasing.



Susan Shipton:

But for public consumption. Trust is everything. And it has to go both ways. And I think it's very easy for people to imagine that a director has to trust an editor. An editor has to trust a director, because we are creative people and we do put ourselves out on the line. When you take somebody's work and cut it together, the first assembly can be a gut-wrenching experience, right? And the great thing about having repeat offenders like Atom in my life is that there's a trust there. And I know that, it's not even that I can experiment or not, because I know I can, it's that if he laughs, it's not going to be horrible.

Susan Shipton:

I mean, I trust that he takes me seriously. I trust that I have that relationship with him, no matter what happens. And he comes from a place of respect with his creative collaborators, and trust and respect is huge. And so, what people say, other than please don't say fuck it up, but what people actually say to me in terms of directing is less important than if, or editing is less important than where they come from. If they come from a place of respect, their direction is going to be better too.

Sarah Taylor:

Well, thank you so much, Susan, for sharing all.

Susan Shipton:

Thank you. Thank you.

Sarah Taylor:

Thanks for joining us today, and a big thank you to our panelists and moderator. A special thanks goes to Jane MacRae, Maureen Grant, and the CCE board for helping create EditCon 2020.

The main title sound design was created by Jane Tattersall. Additional ADR recording by Andrea Rusch. Original music provided by Chad Blain. This episode was mixed and mastered by Tony Bao. The CCE has been supporting Indspire - an organization that provides funding and scholarships to Indigenous post secondary students. We have a permanent portal on our website at [cceditors.ca](http://cceditors.ca) or you can donate directly at [indspire.ca](http://indspire.ca). The CCE is taking steps to build a more equitable ecosystem within our industry and we encourage our members to participate in a way they can.

If you've enjoyed this podcast, please rate and review us on Apple Podcasts and tell your friends to tune in. 'Til next time I'm your host Sarah Taylor.

[Outtro]

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